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## Polio, only a plane ride away?

Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus. It invades the nervous system, and can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours. There is no cure for Polio, however it can be prevented by vaccination.

Despite tremendous progress in reducing the incidence of Polio, it still exists. Polio will continue to be a threat as long as it exists somewhere in the world and in this age of global travel a new outbreak of Polio might only be a plane ride away. It is vital that people ensure they are adequately vaccinated before travelling abroad, particularly to high risk countries such as Nigeria, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Dr George Kassianos, the spokesperson of the Royal College of General Practitioners on immunisation said, "Vaccination has been one of the most successful public health measures ever taken on this planet. It has saved millions of lives around the world.

The Polio vaccine is incorporated in the 5 in 1 vaccine babies receive in their first year of life, with boosters at pre-school and school-leaving ages. The Polio vaccine used today in the UK is a 'killed' (dead) vaccine and contains no harmful mercurial substances such as thiomersal."

Although there have not been any new natural cases of polio in the UK since 1982 there are currently over 100,000 people in the UK who contracted Polio in the outbreak of the last century. Some of these people are now experiencing new symptoms and declining health as a result of Post-Polio Syndrome.

Graham Ball, Chief Executive of the British Polio Fellowship said, "We support our members to lead independent and fulfilling lives but a real aim would be to see Polio completely eradicated. Vaccination plays a key part in this process".

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### Notes to Editor

The British Polio Fellowship was founded in 1939 and offers support, information and social contacts to people with polio.

Polio is a highly infectious disease that primarily affects children under the age of three and can cause paralysis.

Since eradication efforts began in 1988 the incidence of polio has declined by more than 99 percent. Vaccinations have prevented an estimated 500,000 children worldwide per year from contracting polio.

Only five countries are still polio endemic — an all-time low: Nigeria, India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan and Egypt.